

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00736 030525Z
ACTION EA-12

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CINCPAC ONOLULU HI
JCRC HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 736

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, SHUM, US, LA
SUBJECT: MIA'S IN LAOS

REF: STATE 161746 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: AFTER GOING OVER THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR U.S. RICE AID SHIPMENTS, THE CHARGE TOLD LAO MFA UNDER SECRETARY SOUBANH OF THE FORTHCOMING VIETNAMESE VISIT TO THE JCRC'S CENTRAL IDENTIFICATION LABORATORY. SOUBANH WAS TOLD THAT WE CONSIDERED THIS TO BE A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT AND THAT WE HOPED THAT THERE COULD BE SIMILAR PROGRESS WITH LAO MIA'S. SOUBANH PROMISED THAT RESPONSES ON MIA'S WOULD BE PROVIDED. END SUMMARY.

1. I CALLED ON SOUBANH SITILATH, CHEF DE CABINET (UNDER SECRETARY) IN THE LAO FOREIGN MINISTRY, ON JULY 1 TO DISCUSS MIA'S IN LAOS.

2. I OPENED BY GOING OVER THE ARRANGEMENTS WHICH HAD BEEN MADE IN ROME BETWEEN AID AND WFP OFFICIALS FOR THE
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DISTRIBUTION OF U.S. RICE AID TO LAOS (STATE 161832).
I EXPLAINED THAT SINCE WE HAD NO AID ORGANIZATION IN THE LPDR, WE HAD TO MAKE USE OF U. N. CHANNELS. AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED IN ROME TO SEND OUR RICE TO THREE PROJECTS (2446, 2447, AND 2437) WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN AGREED TO BETWEEN THE U.N. AND THE LAO GOVERNMENT. I STRESSED THE POINT THAT THE LAO HAD AGREED TO THE

PROJECTS BECAUSE LAST WEEK WHEN I HAD SEEN SOUBANH AT KHAMTAN'S AIRPORT FAREWELL, HE (SOUBANH) HAD SEEMED A BIT TOUCHY WHEN I TOLD HIM THAT DISCUSSIONS WERE TAKING PLACE IN ROME BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE WFP OVER AID TO LAOS. SOUBANH HAD INDICATED THAT HE WANTED ME TO BE SURE TO KNOW THAT THE LAO WOULD HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT HOW THE RICE WAS DISTRIBUTED.

3. I THEN SAID THAT THERE WAS ANOTHER PROJECT (2438) WHICH HAD NOT YET BEEN AGREED TO BETWEEN THE LAO AND THE U.N. BUT WHICH I HOPED COULD BE INCLUDED IN OUR PROGRAM. I EXPLAINED THAT THIS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT WAS NEAR VIENTIANE AND WOULD THEREFORE BE EASIER AND MORE CONVENIENT TO VISIT. I GAVE SOUBANH A BIT OF PAPER WITH ALL THE PROJECT NUMBERS WRITTEN ON IT.

4. I THEN SAID I WANTED TO DISCUSS ANOTHER SUBJECT. I EXPLAINED THAT I WAS AWARE OF THE FREQUENT STATEMENTS IN THE LAO MEDIA ABOUT A "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" BETWEEN THE LPDR AND VIET NAM. I THEREFORE THOUGHT THAT SOUBANH WOULD BE INTERESTED IN HEARING OF A DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAMESE-U.S. RELATIONS WHICH WE CONSIDERED TO BE IMPORTANT. I GAVE HIM AN ENGLISH TEXT OF THE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S JUNE 27 STATEMENT ABOUT THE FORTHCOMING VIETNAMESE VISIT TO JCRC'S CENTRAL IDENTIFICATION LABORATORY. SOUBANH READ IT AND SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND, EXCEPT THAT HE

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ASKED ME WHAT "MIA" MEANT. I EXPLAINED IN FRENCH AND LAO AND THEN GAVE HIM A QUICK ORAL SUMMARY OF THE SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT JUST TO BE SURE.

5. I TOLD SOUBANH THAT WE THOUGHT THIS WAS A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAMESE-U.S. RELATIONS BECAUSE THE WHOLE QUESTION OF MIA'S WAS SO IMPORTANT TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND TO CONGRESS. I SAID THAT ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE HAD DISCUSSED THE ISSUE WITH KHAMTAN DURING THE LATTER'S INITIAL COURTESY CALL (STATE 165618) AND THAT OUR USE OF BOTH OUR WASHINGTON AND VIENTIANE CHANNELS TO THE LAO GOVERNMENT WAS AN INDICATION OF THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACHED TO THE MIA ISSUE. I THEN GAVE SOUBANH A COPY OF THE LETTER I HAD WRITTEN HIM MAY 23 WHICH HAD HIGHLIGHTED THE LAO MIA PARAGRAPH IN DAS OAKLEY'S HIRC TESTIMONY (VIENTIANE 0584).

6. SOUBANH CONFIRMED THAT HE HAD RECEIVED MY LETTER. I EXPLAINED THAT ANY SORT OF RESPONSE ON MIA'S WOULD BE MOST WELCOME. I DESCRIBED THE DOSSIERS WHICH ACTING DCM CHAMBERLIN HAD GIVEN SOMBAT CHOUNLAMANY, HEAD OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S SECOND DEPARTMENT (VIENTIANE 0049).

I SAID THAT AT THE LEAST WE WOULD APPRECIATE HAVING REPORTS THAT ATTEMPTS HAD BEEN MADE TO EXPLOIT THE INFORMATION IN THE DOSSIERS, EVEN IF THE RESULTS OF THE ATTEMPTS WERE NEGATIVE. THE BEST POSSIBLE RESPONSE, OF COURSE, WOULD BE SOME REMAINS WHICH WOULD ENABLE US TO CLOSE OUT A CASE OR CASES.

7. SOUBANH SAID THAT AS A RESULT OF MY LETTER, HE HAD GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS THAT ATTEMPTS BE MADE TO INVESTIGATE MIA CASES. HE SAID THAT HIS INSTRUCTIONS HAD TO PASS THROUGH SEVERAL MINISTRIES AND THAT THE INVESTIGATIONS WOULD ULTIMATELY HAVE BE MADE BY THE MILITARY. HE WOULD, HOWEVER, PROVIDE ME WITH AN ANSWER TO MY LETTER AND WITH RESPONSES ON SPECIFIC MIA CASES. I THANKED
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SOUBANH FOR THIS ASSURANCE AND SAID THAT I AND MY GOVERNMENT WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE ANY INFORMATION THE LAO COULD GIVE US WHICH WOULD HELP US TO RESOLVE THE MIA ISSUE.

8. COMMENT: SOUBANH'S ATTITUDE WAS ENCOURAGING, BUT WE HAVE YET TO SEE ANY RESULTS. AT LEAST HE DID NOT REHEARSE THE DIFFICULTIES OF INVESTIGATING MIA'S, AND HE GAVE ME A FLAT COMMITMENT THAT WE WOULD RECEIVE RESPONSES. HE WAS SUBDUED AND FORTHCOMING, AND I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE CURRENT SUDDEN DETERIORATION IN FRANCO-LAO RELATIONS/VIENTIANE 0729) MIGHT HAVE PROMPTED HIM TO THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE NEED FOR SOME BALANCE IN THE LPDR'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS.
ROBERTS

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